

The Long Queen

Carol Ann Duffy

The Long Queen couldn't die.

Young when she bowed her head

for the cold weight of the crown, she'd looked

at the second son of the earl, the foreign prince,

the heir to the duke, the lord, the baronet, the count,

then taken Time for a husband. Long live the Queen.

→ Rhetorical question → lack of power
What was she queen of? Women, girls, spinsters and hags, matrons, wet nurses, witches, widows, wives, mothers of all these.

Her word of law was in their bones, in the graft of their hands, in the wild kicks of their dancing.

No girl born who wasn't the Long Queen's always child.

→ Isolation, sacrifice
Unseen, she ruled and reigned; some said

in a castle, some said in the tower in the dark heart

of a wood, some said out and about in rags, disguised,

sorting the bad from the good. She sent her explorers away

in their creaking ships and was queen of more, of all the dead

when they lived if they did so female. All hail to the Queen.

→ Praise, respect, acceptance
What were the laws? Childhood: whether a girl

awoke from the bad dream of the worst, or another

swooned into memory, bereaved, bereft, or a third one

wrote it all down like a charge-sheet, or the fourth never left,

scouring the markets and shops for her old books and toys -

no girl growing who wasn't the apple of the Long Queen's eye.

Blood: proof, in the Long Queen's colour,

royal red, of intent; the pain when a girl

fist bled to be insignificant, no cause for complaint,

and this to be monthly, linked to the moon, till middle age

when the law would change. Tears: salt pearls, bright jewels for

the Long Queen's fingers to weigh as she counted their sorrow.

Childbirth: most to lie on the birthing beds,

push till the room screamed scarlet and children

bawled and slithered into their arms, sore flowers;

some to be godmother, aunt, teacher, teller of tall tales,

but all who were there to swear that the pain was worth it.

No mother bore daughter not named to honour the Queen.

And her pleasures were stories, true or false,

that came in the evening, drifting up on the air

to the high window she watched from, confession

or gossip, scandal or anecdote, secrets, her ear tuned

to the light music of girls, the drums of women, the faint strings

of the old. Long Queen. All her possessions for a moment of time.

→ Metaphor for legacy

→ Immortality through memory

→ Deifies her

→ Desperation, purpose, needed by country

Freedom/choice (Sacrifice)

→ Life taken from her by duty

'Young' → Power forced upon her
↳ Innocence/purity/vulnerable

UC men, nameless
↳ Listing: If married, unable to look after underdogs
UC marriage to continue hegemonic power

Chosen isolation in order to safeguard her family's power

Listing of her subjects
↳ Matron of all women including transgressive

Repetition of 'in'
↳ Actions + power as monarch become intertwined with 16th century femininity

Praise, respect, acceptance

4 women, different memories of / relationship to childhood → difficulty of female childhood

↳ Caring, accepting, warm, loving matriarchal figure

Colour imagery

↳ War/violence

↳ Royalty → Red rose of Tudors

↳ 'First bled' = menstrual cycle

↳ Pelican queen → blood sacrifice

→ Metaphors for female suffering

↳ Adopting women of society

Juxtaposition of visceral, gory images with 'delicate' flowers

↳ Expectation of women to repress their suffering

MIRRORS
Queen's sacrifice

Unity of women, support

Queen becomes symbol of unification of women in society

Surrealism = female stories pushed aside

Duffy shows how Elizabeth represents the legacy/voice/story of women throughout time

→ Rejects male identity

'Cold' → Felt distant from her role at first

↳ England unprepared for a female leader → 'cold' to the idea

↳ Power = a burden
Doesn't care for her individuality/feelings

'weight'

↳ Juxtaposes

'young' → A lot for young Elizabeth

Mythical, fairy tale imagery

↳ Idea of Elizabeth = power

"some said" → People speaking about her: language infiltrates + corrupts society (Foucault)

→ Idea of female queen shifts history

↳ Intangible
(can't touch)

Elizabeth becomes powerful by transcending expectations and becoming an immortal idea